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Milwaukee County

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Testimony of County Executive Chris Abele, Milwaukee County

to

U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights

Dick Durbin, Chair

Lindsey Graham, Ranking Member

Wednesday, September 19, 2012

WASHINGTON DC



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Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the Subcommittee.

Thank you for including my testimony to you today. Chairman Durbin, I appreciate your convening this hearing on hate crimes and the threat of domestic extremism, especially in the wake of the deadly rampage at a Milwaukee-area Sikh temple last month.

I'm Chris Abele and I currently serve as the County Executive for Milwaukee County in Wisconsin. Milwaukee County is the largest county in the state with nearly a million residents and is very diverse: 65.9% of our residents are white, 27.0% are African American, 0.9% are Native American and 3.6% are of Asian descent.

As County Executive I am responsible for coordinating and directing all administrative and management functions of County government. I am also very passionate on Human Rights, an issue being discussed today. I currently sit on the advisory board of the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, a research center located at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and I have spent decades fighting for human rights issues across the globe. In my current elected capacity, I recently re-activated the Milwaukee County Human Rights Commission, which has sat dormant for the past decade.

The deadly and senseless shooting at the Sikh Temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin last month had a big impact on our community and the nation. It was not only an act of extreme violence; it was also an inexcusable act of evil. All these weeks later it is still difficult for me to put into words my sorrow.

In the wake of the shooting, Milwaukee County came together. During numerous services and vigils, the community showed that violence and hate cannot tear us apart, it will only strengthen our resolve and bring us together. The Sikh community has long tradition of standing up for and supporting others, and when they needed support, I'm proud to say the Milwaukee County community came to their aid.

Over the past decade, ignorance and hate has repeatedly contributed to the targeting of Sikh Americans. The Oak Creek temple shooting serves as a stark reminder that hate crimes and extremism are too often part of our daily lives and that we must remain vigilant and speak out when those around us spread hate and ignorance. We need to continue to foster dialogue on the contributing factors to this tragedy and explore the potential solutions needed to make another incident like Oak Creek unthinkable.

Again, thank you Chairman Durbin for creating this opportunity.

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